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England in the Fifteenth Century. By the Rev. W. DENTON.
London, George Bell and Sons, 1888.— 337 pp.

The fifteenth century is the most obscure in the social history of England since the Norman conquest, and it is perhaps the one to which modern investigators have given the least attention. Any serious attempt, therefore, to show us whether indeed it had a character of its own or was anything more than a continuation of the fourteenth century, calls for our especial attention. Mr. Denton's book is not undeserving of this attention : it is a storehouse of information, drawn for the most part from documents of the period. The introduction, which takes up a third part of the volume and deals with the four preceding centuries, does indeed sometimes go over ground already well-trodden ; and the authorities referred to are not always the most adequate. But, take it all in all, the book is a very useful one ; it is the product of painstaking industry, and it is marked by no little independence of judgment. It is to be regretted that Mr. Denton did not live to enjoy the success which his book has deservedly met with.

To the industrial and commercial activity of his period Mr. Denton scarcely alludes. It is England outside the towns that interests him ;— the cultivation of the soil ; the food, dress, houses of the countryfolk ; the revenues of the lords of manors ; the power of the great nobles. It is on this last-mentioned subject that he writes most vigorously, and his concluding chapter describes the baronial feuds which characterized the century more vividly, and with greater wealth of illustration, than any other account with which I am familiar. Bishop Stubbs, however, long ago pointed out the main features of the Lancastrian “ want of governance ” ; so that here Mr. Denton had only to work along lines already indicated. What light of his own has our author to throw on the development of society, especially on that most important side of it, the break-up of the manorial system, which, there seems so much reason to think, took place about this time ?

Well, this at least has to be said, that if Mr. Denton does not exactly *prove* anything before uncertain,— and I hardly think he does,— he gives a healthy shock to some of the ideas we are likely to be entertaining. He begins, it is true, by accepting Professor Rogers' version of the events of 1381,— the “ attempt ” of the landowners “ to revert to personal services ” from their tenants instead of money rents, and so forth,— a theory for which, as was pointed out in the preceding number of this QUARTERLY, no evidence has yet been adduced ; and then we expect him to go on to tell us how halycon a time the first half of the next century was for the copyholder and laborer ; for herein Mr. Rogers has been followed by writers of all parties, by Mr. Prothero as by Mr.

Hyndman. But instead of this, Mr. Denton's tale is of sordid misery. The black death, he tells us, was but the first and most terrible of a long succession of pestilences throughout the next hundred and fifty years; "a sad monotony of suffering" (pages 103-105). The laborers' wages could barely keep body and soul together; and when corn did chance to be cheap, employers had the option by statute of paying in the cheapened commodity at the old rates, instead of in money (pages 213-222). I cannot say that Mr. Denton's narrative is convincing: the pestilences of the fifteenth century appear, from his own quotations, to have chiefly affected the towns; and his argument as to wages would seem to prove that in that respect at any rate the laborer was better off than he is to-day. Still, the very fact that after prolonged study of the time Mr. Denton feels obliged to paint his picture in such sombre colors, is one worth thinking over.

Mr. Denton recognizes clearly enough that the turning point in economic development was not the end of the fourteenth, but the end of the fifteenth century; and that it is to be found in the transition from tillage to pasture. Here again he maintains a position, novel so far as I am aware, which challenges our consideration. It is that "at the end of the fifteenth century, the fertility of the arable land of England was well nigh exhausted"; so that, selfish and cruel as it may have been, the change was beneficial and even necessary. "The chief part of the sixteenth century was one long fallow for the old exhausted arable lands." "The ground had the rest it needed" (pages 153-154). This "decline of agriculture" is witnessed to, says Mr. Denton, by the lowering of rents, by smaller crops, and by the less frequent use of marl (pages 147-150). But the evidence he adduces is very scanty; and of the diminished power of production, which is the most important of his assertions, he gives no proof at all. Still, the possibility is one which future students will do well to bear in mind.

It is a pity that with so much industry Mr. Denton was not able to contribute something more positive to the explanation of the agrarian revolution. The reason is this, — and here I am obliged to point to the one great defect of the book, — that Mr. Denton never really grasped the nature of the agricultural village community. He frequently refers to Mr. Seebohm's epoch-making work; and yet, describing the arable lands of a manor, he tells us that each of the two or three fields "were divided into strips generally a furlong in length," and "every tenant of the manor held *a strip* in each of these fields" (page 199). Either Mr. Seebohm's exposition of the nature of a yard-land was thrown away upon our author, or else the text and the notes were written at different times, and the text never properly revised. The same impression is created by Mr. Denton's constant use of the terms

"farm," "farmer," and "agricultural laborer" (see *e.g.* pages 153, 171 220). In most of these passages, perhaps, some meaning can be assigned to the term not inconsistent with the circumstances of the time : in one place we may understand by "farmer" a substantial copyholder, in another the lessee of the demesne. Still, language such as this is sure to bring before the ordinary reader the picture of a modern farm, of modern farmers and modern laborers ; and we cannot help thinking that this was what Mr. Denton himself had in his mind. The suspicion reaches something like conviction when we see the use he makes of the most significant piece of information at his disposal, and one not before printed. This is a letter addressed by the vicar of Quinton to the president of Magdalen college, Oxford, about the year 1490 (page 318). The college was the lord of the manor, or "town," as it is here called ; and had recently leased it (giving probably immediate possession of the demesne, together with all their manorial rights over the rest of the land) to a "farmor," instead of dealing directly with the copyholders or other tenants, as they had previously been accustomed. They had now "one man to their tenant" instead of "the [old] tenants of the town." This "farmor," by means not specified, had got rid of many of the old tenants : "your housing," says the writer "goes down ; twenty marks will not set up again that which is fallen within these four years." The consideration which influenced the college was, that the farmer paid a higher rent ; and they were indisposed to restore the old state of things unless the small tenants as a body would agree to pay as much. The vicar protests against this : "Methink it is more meritory to support and succour a community than one man." If they, being divines, do a thing of this kind, it will attract unfavorable comment, and also be "an example to lay people to cast down towns." "I marvel greatly that ye stick so sore to make the tenants to give more than the other men have given before," considering how much greater are their expenses than those of a man "who keeps no household upon it, but brings all to the penny" ; and he offers, if the college will agree to let the old tenants have the towns for a yearly rent of £30, to give to the president his gray horse and be himself responsible for the rent.

The general purport of the letter is absolutely clear : it is an attempt to maintain a condition of things that had recently been broken in upon. But Mr. Denton's imagination was so preoccupied by the social relations of our own day that he could see in this nothing but a philanthropic effort to promote "allotments" (page 246) ; even "our poor town" becomes "land near" the kindly vicar's "parish."

On minor defects it is not necessary to dwell ; nor would it be fair to do so without also mentioning some of the many subjects whereon Mr. Denton has collected abundant and trustworthy information. Mr. Den-

ton was wanting in that sort of imaginative power which enables a man to realize conditions remote from those around him, and the fruits of his labor are in consequence used to less advantage than they might have been. Yet the book will be a great help to all subsequent students of the period.

W. G. ASHLEY.

Die Entstehung des Agrarschutzes in England. Ein Versuch, von Dr. RICHARD FABER. Strassburg, Karl Trübner, 1888. — 8vo, viii, 173 pp.

Arthur Young has told us in his *Political Arithmetic* that the first step in breaking with the mediæval European agricultural and commercial policy was taken by England in 1670. The law 22 Charles II, c. 13 levied high duties on the importation of corn up to a certain price, and the following law of 1689 granted a premium on the exportation of corn up to a certain price. The other European countries on the other hand forbade the exportation of corn for more than a century, and sought to encourage its importation. What was the reason of this sudden change of policy on England's part? What were its results? What finally caused the opposition to and disappearance of this innovation? These are the questions which Dr. Faber has set himself to answer in the essay which was originally a doctor's dissertation, since revised and edited in the series of *Abhandlungen aus dem staatswissenschaftlichen Seminar* of Professors Knapp and Brentano (then of Strassburg).

During the twelfth and thirteenth centuries the controlling consideration was the fear of dearth — which for a long time denoted not scarcity but dearth. Agricultural production was localized; every town was dependent for its food on its immediate vicinity. Hence the prohibition of exportation, whether from province to province, or from country to country. England still followed the *Theuerungspolitik* or consumers' policy as we might call it. But a new era began with the attempt of the monarch to secure independent sources of revenue. The crown, in return for substantial considerations, commenced to grant licenses to export. A struggle ensued between this fiscal policy of the crown, and the consumers' policy of the people. It was a contest between export duties and prohibition. With the defeat of the crown at the close of the fourteenth century the consumers' policy triumphed, and exports were strictly prohibited. But now we notice a new point of view. Some of the maritime provinces had developed a considerable agricultural activity under the system of export licenses. The landowner now demanded freedom of export. And not only this, but the mercantilist element began to make its appearance and the landowner demanded protection, *i.e.* prohibition of imports when prices were low.